

HIST 6501

HISTORIOGRAPHY: AMERICAN MILITARY HISTORY

This course will introduce you to the study of American military history. This historical field of specialization focuses on American wars and military institutions within a larger context that has been variously labeled as the history of defense policy, the national security policy of the United States, “the American way of war,” and the history of American “strategic culture.”

American military history may be studied within two much broader historical phenomenon: the history of warfare and the history of the American people from the colonial era until the 21st Century. Either is appropriate. The interpretive foundation of this course, however, will be the history of the American people and their nation. The history of warfare is a secondary theme, more appropriate to the education of military professionals, not civilian academics. The difference in focus means that the study of American military history is one of many areas of historical study that provides a valid, if bounded, perspective on the development of American society, economic structure, governmental structure, and foreign policy, which in turn shape defense policy and military institutions.

The readings for this course are the following books:

Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America (rev. ed. 1994)

Jerry K. Sweeney, A Handbook of American Military History: From the Revolutionary War to the Present (2nd ed. 1996)

Jenny L. Presnell, The Information Literate Historian (2007)

James M. Crisp, Sleuthing the Alamo (2004)

In addition, I will distribute handouts that are professional guides, academic papers, and journal articles. They are listed in the class schedule-syllabus.

The graded assignments for this course will all be papers of a professional character, focusing on historiography and themes in American military history. There will three such writing assignments.

In addition, the class will deal with issues that define the working culture of professional historians, including dealing with peers, students, editors, journalists, history “buffs,” museum staffs, and representatives of the armed forces.

History
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1st meeting: Pass out syllabus and required reading for 2nd meeting:

Millett and Maslowski, For the Common Defense, Introduction

David Kennedy, "War and the American Character," Stanford Magazine 3 (Spring-Summer, 1975), pp. 14-72.

Patrick Porter, "Good Anthropology, Bad History: The Cultural Turn in Studying War," Parameters 37 (Summer, 2007) pp. 45-58.

Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, "The Lessons of War," The National Interest 14 (Winter, 1988/89), pp. 83-95.

Philip S. Meilinger, "American Military Culture and Strategy," Joint Forces Quarterly, Issue no. 46 (3rd Quarter, 2007), pp. 80-86.

John Shy, "The American Military Experience: History and Learning," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 1 (Winter, 2004), pp. 205-228.

Peter Paret, "The History of War," Daedalus 100 (Spring, 1971), pp. 376-396.

2nd meeting: "Fundamentals of American Military History"

Discussion: readings assigned at 1st meeting. Themes: the nature, uses, and abuses of military history; the intellectual analysis of American history; the historical profession in America.

Readings for third meeting:

Millett and Maslowski, For the Common Defense, Chapters 1-3.

Michael Kammen, "Clio and Changing Fashions," The American Scholar 44 (Summer, 1975), 484-496.

Millett, "American Military History: Over the Top" in Bass, The State of American History (1971), pp. 157-182; "American Military History: Struggling through the Wire," ACTA, 8th Congress, ICMH, 1975 "The Study of American Military History," Military Affairs (April, 1977), pp. 58-61.

3rd meeting: “Writing American Military History”

Discussion: historiographical trends in military history; influence of the social sciences; the colonial period and the American Revolution.

Readings for 4th meeting:

Millett and Maslowski, For the Common Defense, Chapter 4.

Sweeny, American Military History, Chapter 1.

Don Higginbotham, “The Early American Way of War,” William and Mary Quarterly 44 (April, 1987), 230-273.

E. Wayne Carp, “Early American Military History,” Virginia Magazine 94 (July, 1986), pp.259-283.

4th meeting: “From Colonies to New Nation, 1607-1815”

Discussion: review of colonial period; the Revolution; armed forces and the new nation. Research on military history topics in the United States

Readings for 5th meeting:

Millett and Maslowski, For the Common Defense, Chapter 5.

Sweeny, American Military History, Chapter 2.

Crisp, Sleuthing the Alamo.

5th meeting: “Two Frontiers and the Mexican War”

Discussion: military policy and national maritime and territorial expansion; race and ethnicity in military history.

Reading for the 6th meeting:

Millett and Maslowski, For the Common Defense, Chapters 6-7.

6th meeting: “The Civil War”

First paper due.

Discussion: understanding the Civil War as a political and strategic problem.

Reading for 7th meeting: to be determined

7th meeting: “The Civil War”

Discussion: fighting the Civil War

Reading for 8th meeting:

Millett and Maslowski, For the Common Defense, Chapters 8-9.

Sweeny, American Military History, Chapter 3.

8th meeting: “From Continental Frontier to New Empire: The Wars of 1898-1902”

Discussion: armed forces and the end of the constabulary century; the United States and international rivalries; the political foundation for military reform; the revolution in military technology.

Readings for the 9th meeting:

Millett and Maslowski, For the Common Defense, Chapters 10-12.

9th meeting: “Progressivism and World War I”

Second paper due.

Discussion: American participation in World War I; the influence of Progressivism on military policy; “lessons of World War I” and industrial warfare.

Readings for 10th meeting:

Millett and Maslowski, For the Common Defense, Chapters 12-13.

Jenny L. Presnell, The Information Literate Historian (read until end of semester).

Sweeny, American Military History, Chapter 4.

10th meeting: “The Interwar Period and World War II”

Discussion: military innovation in the interwar period; U.S. war planning; U.S. rearmament after 1937; Alliance politics; American conduct of the war, 1941-1943.

11th meeting: “World War II”

Discussion:

Millett and Maslowski, For the Common Defense, Chapter 14.

Sweeny, American Military History, Chapters 5 and 6.

John Lynn, “World War I and World War II as Historical Metaphor,” ACDIS Bulletin 1 (March, 1987).

Richard Fox et. al., “A Round Table: Living and Reliving of World War II,” JAH (September 1990), pp. 553-593.

Reading for meeting 12:

Millett and Maslowski, For the Common Defense, Chapters 16-18.

Allan R. Millett, “The Korean War,” Journal of Strategic Studies 24 (March, 2001).

Paul Kennedy, “The Fall and Rise of Military History,” Yale Journal of World Affairs 1 (Fall, 1989), pp. 12-19.

Edward M. Coffman, “The New American Military History,” 49 Military Affairs (January, 1984), pp. 1-5.

12th meeting: “American National Security Policy and the Cold War”

Discussion: Strategic nuclear deterrence and forward, collective defense; the wars for Korea and Vietnam; the debates over defense spending, and civilian control of the military; the new armed forces.